

The Manufactured Clash: Role of Arab State-Media in Conflict Resolution in the Gulf

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Abstract: *The paper focuses on the role of Arab state-media in conflict resolution in the Gulf. Drawing from the media theory coined by Noam Chomsky, the paper highlights the agenda-setting model of media and analyzing the various meanings of 'conflict'. To further contextualize this theoretical discourse, the case-study of Press TV (Iran) and Al Arabiya (Saudi Arabia) have been chosen for the time-frame from January – May 2019. Firstly, the paper would describe the genesis of the respective media channels, their soft-power approach and how they categorically exacerbate the Iran-Saudi Arabia rivalry. The political, economic, social and cultural aspects of the rivalry are mediated, often manufactured to impact the cognitive psychology of the natives, thereby creating acrimony, sectarianism and hatred. Secondly, in the above mentioned time-frame, the news pieces, features, documentaries and interviews published/broadcasted would be studied through the research methodology of content analysis. After understanding the psychological imperative of manufacturing news to further escalate conflict, the works of the above mentioned scholars would be contextualized to gauge the intention and impact of both the media channels. Towards the end, drawing from the analytical discourse of how media plays a significant role in conflict-resolution would be understood. The frame of reference for this dichotomy (of both perpetrating and resolving conflict) is a serious discourse that needs to be utilized to chalk-out practical solutions. The paper would also highlight the respective challenges faced by the media itself, due to it being the government's mouthpiece and lacking democratization within itself, which further escalates the Iran-Saudi Arabia rivalry. Towards the end, the paper would focus on the necessary limitations faced due to the functioning of the deep-state in both Iran and Saudi Arabia, which is difficult to academically scrutinize due to the lack of empirical and descriptive sources. Highlighting this challenge, the paper would further explain how media's role becomes more essential. Questioning the normative fallacy in understanding the media's role in conflict-resolution, the paper fills the research gap currently prevalent in this discourse to endow further political suggestions, solutions and resolutions in the Gulf politics.*

Keywords: Al Arabiya TV, Press TV, Trump administration, manufactured consent

1. Introduction

For decades, academic scholars have tried to define conflict and the multi-faceted ways in which it is caused and the power dynamics that controls it. The post-colonial society, especially the third world, witnessed several conflicts of varying degrees. Often, the first-world rhetoric of calling such episodes as civil wars, conflicts, uprisings, revolutions or invasions in their political conceptions, just reveals the internal hegemony of power that continues till today. The power to name, describe and recall a certain tumultuous event in the political history of a country through the orientalist lens is both apt and yet flawed.

Contextualizing the meaning of conflict through the lens of sociology might be just. Adding another dimension to this debate, the description of conflict also suffers the normative or positivist debate. Can conflict be quantified empirically or is conflict a qualitative variable? The current research gap continues in defining conflict in the context of Gulf domestic politics and comparing it, later with what a manufactured clash denotes.

The divorce between theoretical research and facts is palpable in conceptualizing conflict. Coser (1956) defines conflict as a struggle over claims and values, resources as well as power, in which the participating actors aim to destroy, neutralize or injure the competing rivals.¹ Yet, he does include both the functions as well as the dysfunctions

in conceptualizing conflict. He explains how conflict is central and fundamental part of social cohesion as it re-establishes the boundaries. It creates the 'social awareness of the separateness', thus, establishing various identities and interests. Though, it also has several dysfunctional, dissociating and disruptive consequences.

While Galtung (1996) ideates conflict empirically by stating a simple hypothesis based on the claim that 'Something is standing in the way of something else.'² According to him, conflict is a triadic construct that includes assumptions/attitudes, behavior and contradiction. Interestingly, he opines that constructs like states, gender, race, country and region are all abstractions. Instead, the phenomenological lens reveals that conflict is essential in life. Thus, life is also essential in conflict. The stages of conflict have the same dichotomies as life cycles. The variables that he empirically uses include nature, time, space, person, society, culture and world to explain the fluidity of the concept of conflict.

Given the above definition, Levi-Strauss (1958)³ adds that conflict, thus, is inevitable and a latent reality present in every culture. The ideation of norms has been constructed to curtail the potential of conflict, both psychologically and sociologically. Yet, academically, the ambiguity of concretely defining a conflict faces another challenge in spite of several definitions. Does conflict mean equal parties

¹ Coser A. L., (1956) *The Functions of Social Conflict*. Free Press: New York

² Galtung J., (1996). *Peace by Peaceful Means: Peace and Conflict, Development and Civilization*. International Peace Research Institute: Oslo

³ Levi-Strauss, C. (1958). *Anrhrcpologb sructuralc [Sructural Anrhropology]*. Plon: Paris

competing against each other, both in terms of hegemony, money power, political capital and military strength? If, say, both the parties are not equal in any one such variable, can it still be called a conflict? Or, would it be better to create a new vocabulary for such political-sociological event, such as a manufactured clash.

Drawing from the context and discourse of 'manufacturing consent' by Chomsky and Herman (1988)⁴, the paper uses the terminology of 'manufactured clash'. Here, it means, perhaps a conflict, which is not overtly described as one due to the unequal status of the participating actors. Instead, it is created through propaganda, market forces as well as media imperialism which works incessantly to actively hide the very presence of the unequal forces to avoid mitigation or even the rhetoric of resolution. The case of unequal powers, especially in the context of West Asia (Middle East) as several states here have been mere proxies of international powers. The research gap in empirically or through qualitative theorization continues as the very term 'equal powers' is ignored. Also, the term 'clash' gained limelight through Samuel Huntington's (1993) 'clash of civilizations' in which he predicted that even though nation-state would remain a principal actor, the conflicts would be caused due to cultural reasons instead of economy or ideology.⁵ The serious question to ask here is why Huntington used the term 'clash' as the principal way of defining conflict. Thus, the paper tries to raise this question, as it further delves deeper into the context of Gulf politics.

Role of media in manufacturing the clash in West Asia

The historic tentacles of how western media often creates the reality of the West Asian countries are an open debate. Often, while covering/broadcasting the political clashes in West Asia, the western media has embraced an orientalist lens. More often, it also reveals the power balances between the western international powers with the respective Arab countries, which are still perhaps in the nascent phase of independence after struggling with the inferno of colonialism. The political urgency of creating a cause-effect discourse about the Arab world without the historical, political and sociological construct of the various Arab realities continues till date. Be it the failure to frame the Israel-Palestine conflict (the very context which shows the inequality in conflict) in a just manner to restlessly labeling Arab uprisings from December 2010 in the Arab streets as 'Arab Spring', reveals this fractures.

Puddephatt (2006) correctly states that media has two roles in any kind of conflict.⁶ Firstly, it can integrate itself within the context and play a role in either causing or mitigating the conflict. Secondly, it can choose to stay away and act as a significant factor in conflict resolution. At the same time, it should be noted that modern conflicts have become scattered, fragmented, random and episodic. Thus, media

⁴ Herman E. & Chomsky, N., (1988). *Manufacturing Consent: The Political Economy of the Mass Media*. Vintage Digital: New York

⁵ Huntington, S.P., (1993), *The Clash of Civilizations?*, *Foreign Affairs* 72(3).

⁶ Puddephatt, A., (2006), 'Conflict and the role of Media,' *The International Media Support*, Retrieved from <https://www.mediasupport.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/11/ims-voices-of-war-2006.pdf>

also faces the challenge of neatly placing them into structures, definitions and constructs. The upsurge of terms like CNN effect and Al Jazeera effect also explain how media discourse can change policy-frameworks, thus making them even more important actors.

Along with transferring information, media also plays a pivotal role in ameliorating the conflict by creating space for communication, bargaining and even transformation. Though, scholarly scrutiny needs to be done on whether it's regional media or the international media networks that have more chances in conflict resolution. Interestingly, a study done by Seung-Whan Choi and Patrick James (2007) regarding the inter-state conflicts from 1950 to 1992 reveals that media openness does have a dampening impact on the Militarized Interstate Disputes. Additionally, the impact of democracy also has significant impact.⁷ But as the study of media and its relation with conflict witnesses further study, the question once raised by Foucault (1998) deserves attention. As he rightly opined, the question is not whether a culture without restraint is possible but whether the systemic constraints in the society would leave individuals the liberty to transform this very system. If thought deeply, it is a very crucial question as media too, is made up of people, with their own identities and interests.⁸

The structure of conflict needs to be studied, too. Post cold war era, the conflicts have transformed into civil wars, which are often not between armies or states, but within the very domestic set-up of the respective countries. In certain cases, foreign intervention also plays a role in causing the conflict. The entire aspect of hyper-reality then streams in. What is the truth, what really did happen? These questions are often ubiquitous but are explained through the lens of media, be it local or trans-national, depending more on the funding agencies involved. Daoud Kuttub (2007) rightly mentioned that wars and conflicts are often fought in the hearts of people along with the battlefields. He quotes that survey by Committee to Protect Journalists (2007) revealing that 242 journalists had died in Iraq from 2003-2007.⁹

Additionally, the US Army had also made it clear that they would not protect the lives of freelance journalists who are not embedded in the military. The US Army had destroyed the television-station in Baghdad. These attacks by warring parties have become the norm of warfare, thereby creating more challenges and limitations in reporting about the conflict. As a result, terms like 'parachute journalism' emerged, where conflict reporting was often done by crews who had limited knowledge of the language, culture, history or politics of the parties in conflict.¹⁰

⁷ Choi, S., & James, P. (2007). Media Openness, Democracy and Militarized Interstate Disputes. *British Journal of Political Science*, 37(1), 23-46. Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4497278>

⁸ Foucault, M. (1998). *Ethics: Subjectivity and Truth* (Essential Works of Foucault, 1954-1984, Vol. 1), New York: The New Press.

⁹ Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ), "Statistical profile of journalists killed on duty since 2003", available at http://www.cpj.org/Briefings/Iraq/Iraq_danger.html

¹⁰ Kuttub, D., (2007), 'The media and Iraq: a blood bath for and gross dehumanization of Iraqis', *International Review of the Red*

These political and journalistic realities thus lead to the idea of 'manufacturing clash', as recommended by the paper. Cottle (2006) has questioned the truth in media-tized conflicts, delving deeper into the hidden realities, narratives, editorial policies and intentions especially in the current era where innumerable platforms are available for information but not understanding. The impact of social media and the ambiguity that it creates is once again a limitation and is heavily dependent on the sources that have internet access but might not be clearly linked with the ramifications of the conflict.

Genesis of Arab Media: Case Study of Press TV and Al Arabiya

Every Arab country has its own media, both print and electronic that prints/broadcasts news that have been permitted by the government for circulation. These media platforms are significant for speculating and critiquing the policy dimensions of the respective Arab governments. Most of the Arab countries had their own Ministry of Information which dealt with press censorship so that it does not go out of the bounds, the narrative of the state is represented unquestioningly as the Arab media networks were used as mouth-pieces of the government. It was a testing time for the Arab governments though, as they were not skilled in manufacturing news according to their own verbatim and hence, the unpredictability of the Arab media was a new feature, needing containment.

In the early ages of Arab nationalism, this philosophy enhanced the understanding of media's role as a tool for safeguarding and strengthening unity, identity and perspectives on modernity. In fact, the roots of such an understanding had started to emerge, both at the individual and the communal level through broader understanding of Ottomanism, nationalism and Islamism. Foreign embassies and Turkish authorities had predominant control over newspapers in the Arab World that were in existence right from the mid eighteenth century. Print media was often used to defend the sanctity of tradition and faith under the religious establishments starting from the Ottoman Empire. It also became a contested platform for debating on issues related to Islamic revivalism, independence, justice and freedom. Also the very concept of 'nationhood and 'national identity' emerged with the emergence of national press. National literatures also developed with the improvement in printing technologies. In fact, the production of national literature was in tandem with the implementation of censorship rules in the Arab world.

After independence, the very basic understanding of what Arab media meant and could mean in future slowly changed. The change was not merely a perception of Arab media by the Arabs themselves but also for the international community. Political ideologies started to carve out the direction and growth of Arab media. Slowly, the entrance of technology acted like a catalyst for aggrandizement of media platforms.

Understanding of the gradual development and impact of Arab political thought becomes urgent in understanding the growth of Arab media especially after independence. Also, independence of many Arab states marked the end of abolition of multi-party system and establishment of one party rule. Thus, the freedom of expression was also limited, thereby having repercussions on how the Arab media developed. On the other hand, the relaxed rules aided Al-Qaeda to disperse its messages through Arab media channels which started questioning the entire ideology that such media platforms supported. Thus, growth of Arab media after independence of most of the Arab countries has been controlled through media laws. These laws are meant to preserve the government's policies. The emergency law which had been implemented in Egypt and Syria along with other Arab countries could punish journalists who defined the dignity of the state. The Arab governments have control over the renewal and revocation of necessary licenses. Interestingly, even Islamic theories of news and communication started guiding the growth of Arab Media. According to Abd al-Latif Hamza, an Islamic theorist, objectivity and social responsibility became crucial in understanding the Islamic approach to journalism.

The slow 'Islamisation of information' differentiated between da'wa and khabar. Precedence was given to da'wa which meant Allah's straight path while khabar signified the foundation of knowledge. There were several political factors that influenced the growth and freedom bestowed to Arab media. Few of them include - Arab nationalism, independence from Ottomans, British and the French, establishment of the State of the Israel, coups, civil wars, Gulf wars and development of the ideology of political Islam. Ironically, pan-Arab regimes also controlled over mass media to promote a peculiar brand of Arabism which signified that only the respective local regimes were properly Arab and were capable of taking actions in the Arab interest.

Chiba Yushi (2012) had opined that introduction of satellite television channels in the 1990s would alter the relations between the Arab media and the political authority. In fact, just like 'Glassnot' led to the nullification of state control, Arab media would also become a reason behind democratic quest within the Arab world.¹¹ While Philip Seib (2007) believes that Arab news media stationed outside the country is more trusted because it is presumed that they are not pressurized by the local political authority. He states that globalization does lead to freer flow of information which in turn acts against the interests of the repressive governments, thereby enhancing the aspirations and chances of democracy. Though, at the same time, increase in the flow of information is not a guarantee for democracy in itself.¹²

Al Arabiya was launched as a news broadcaster on 3rd March 2003 in Dubai in United Arab Emirates. Its governing motto was 'reasoned and responsible freedom.'

¹¹Yushi, C., (2012), A comparative study of the Pan Arab media studies: The case of Egypt and Saudi Arabia. *Kyoto bulletin of Islamic Area Studies*, 5(2):47-60

¹² Seib, P., (2007), *New Media and the New Middle East*, Palgrave Macmillan: London

while providing alternative Arab news in and outside the region. Its mission statement declared itself as ‘an Arabic station, from the Arabs to the Arabs, delivering content that is relevant to the Arabs.’ The main coverage areas of Al Arabiya included current affairs, politics, business, sports, finance and science. GCC countries along with Asia Pacific, South East Asia, Europe, North America and Australia are covered by Al Arabiya.¹³

Currently, the channel is managed by Abdul Rahman al-Rashed and owned by businessman Waleed al-Ibrahim who has close connections (brother in law) with the Saudi Royal family.¹⁴ It is a part of the Middle East Broadcasting Corporation which is financed by Saudi Arabia. Its online site was launched on 22nd February, 2004. At times, it is assumed that Al Arabiya is biased towards its Saudi patrons. Interestingly, Saudi Arabia had launched the Middle East Broadcasting Corporation in response to the Gulf crisis. It was pertinent for Saudi Arabia to intelligently use Arab media in order to meticulously respond to critiques questioning its political system and credibility. Over the period of time, Saudi Arabia established entertainment platforms such as Orbit entertainment TV and Arab Television and Radio Network. (ART).

Innumerable reasons and strategic actions are debated to question the origin of Al Arabiya. Firstly, taking into consideration the particular timing of the launch of Al Arabiya, it becomes quite interesting to delve deeper into the vulnerable and sensitive points of the country’s protection. For example, right after the 9/11 attacks and the invasion of Iraq, anti-Saudi sentiments had started to emerge in the Western political circles. In fact, it was even recommended in the reports revealed by the Western media that there were plans to fragment the kingdom. Saudis felt uncomfortable with discussions on occupation of the Eastern province, establishment of a state in Hejaz where the holy cities of Mecca-Medina are located.¹⁵ On the international front, Al Arabiya shot into limelight when Hisham Melhem, the bureau chief of Al Arabiya in Washington was able to get the first television interview of United States’ President Obama in 2009. What became difficult for Al Arabiya was to reach the remote areas with its objective reporting. Nabil Khatib, the news chief of Al Arabiya believes that huge information gap does exist because local stations do not provide the information to the viewers and Al Arabiya in turn, does not provide it, because these news are local.¹⁶

Turning into the political-social cultural reality of Iran, the following excerpt from the constitution (Article 3, section 2) framed after the Revolution of 1979 needs to be understood:

“Raising the level of public consciousness in all areas by the correct use of press, mass media and other means of communication. The mass-communication media (radio, television), in the developmental process of the Islamic Revolution, must be utilized in the service of disseminating Islamic culture. Against this background, it must benefit from the altercations among sound ideas and must assiduously refrain from propagating and spreading destructive and anti-Islamic attributes.”

While the Article 24 mentions that freedom of press would be inculcated in Iran by providing a free environment for press to express their matters until and unless they are injurious to the fundamental of Islam.¹⁷

Scholars like Baghestan (2010) state that in spite of the empowering tone of the Iranian constitution, the press remains quite vulnerable in Iran. The media platforms fall into two camps. Either they are pro the government or fall under the opposition camp. Meanwhile, after China, Iran has the highest number of blogs which states the growth of online journalism in the country. Few of the challenges that media in Iran suffer from are lack of professionalism, funding, anachronistic nature of the media legislation and the ambiguous definition of the meaning of ‘media offense.’¹⁸

Press TV is a 24-hour-English and French language television headquartered in Tehran and is affiliated with the Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting (IRIB). In an attempt to compete with BBC, Al Jazeera and CNN, Press TV was launched on July 8, 2007. It is state-funded and the name of the CEO is Mohammad Sarafraz. The ideology of the channel was to break the stronghold of the international media giants. During the initial nascent phase, it started with headquarters in Washington, London, New York, Damascus and Beirut. It also emerged due to extensive US Pressure on Iran in relation to the nuclear weapons development.¹⁹

In fact, BBC reports that Press TV is pro-Palestine, against the sanctions imposed by US along with being very critical of UK and US foreign policy.²⁰ As the Supreme Leader directly appoints the head of IRIB through respective constitutional authorization, the importance of Press TV gets further enhanced. Over the period of time, Press TV along with its website has reached impressive readership from Europe, US and South Asia. But when compared with Al Jazeera and Al Arabiya, Press TV has clearly established itself as a partisan media space.²¹

¹⁷ The Preamble of Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran, 1979 <https://www.wipo.int/edocs/lexdocs/laws/en/ir/ir001en.pdf>

¹⁸ Baghestan, A.B and Hassan, M.U. (2014), Human Communication. A Publication of the Pacific and Asian Communication Association. 12(3): 239-254

¹⁹ Fathi, N. (2007), Iran expands role in media, via satellite and in English, The New York Times, <https://www.nytimes.com/2007/07/03/world/asia/03iht-web0703iran.6459744.html>

²⁰ Pressley, L. (2012), Iran's battle for TV influence takes shape on Press TV, The BBC, <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-16317282>

²¹ Alexa. (2013a). Audience demographics for Presstv.ir. Retrieved from <https://www.alexa.com/siteinfo/presstv.ir>

¹³Seib, P.,(2012). Al Jazeera English- Global News in a Changing world, Palgrave Macmillan: London

¹⁴Allied Media Corporation, (2018). History of Al Arabiya TV, Multicultural Communication, Retrieved from: <http://www.allied-media.com/ARABTV/AlarabiyaHIST.htm>

¹⁵Hammond A., (2007), Saudi Arabia's Media Empire: keeping the masses at home , *Arab Media and Society*, Issue Retrieved from <http://www.arabmediasociety.com/?article=420>

¹⁶Pintak, L.,(2011). The New Arab Journalist- Mission and Identity in the time of Turmoil, I.B. Taurus: London

Though, it's interesting to notice the paradox within the functioning of Press TV. Even though it gives space to the dominant hegemony and voices within the Islamic Republic, but at the same time, it follows the governance discourse which has limited tolerance for respective unorthodox narratives. The legitimacy gap can be addressed if this paradox can be solved. Though, it has been also criticized for repeating the newsfeed from BBC, AFP and other media platforms since it has such an anti-western ideology.

One of the major challenges faced while researching about Press TV reveals how very limited academic analysis is available about its editorial policy, controversies and media narratives by even the scholars from the West. In fact, Doffman (2019) reported in the Forbes that Google had cut the YouTube access of Press TV without any warning.²² In the past, the TV license of Press TV was suspended in UK and few other European countries, too. Thus, the dearth of academic research poses a serious challenge while framing the narratives, ideologies of the television network.

Cold War rivalry between Saudi Arabia and Iran

Since the uprisings in the Arab world in January 2011, the cold-war rivalry between Iran and Saudi Arabia has witnessed political tensions and proxy war mongering. Interestingly, the uprisings that galvanized across the borders from Tunisia, Egypt, Syria, Yemen, Bahrain and Libya failed to create a social and political upheaval in Iran or Saudi Arabia. Both these countries faced heightened domestic pressure within their own geographies. Starting with Iran, the impact of US President Trump's bilateral policies against Iran and termination of the Nuclear treaty did severe the financial crisis already haunting every Iranian citizen as the price of their currency fell further. Though, foreign media like Reuters and Guardian did report about the protests taking place in Iran in 2018, there was no concrete retaliation that could perhaps emulate the 1979 revolution in Iran. Meanwhile, the sudden absence of Saudi Journalist Jamal Khassoghi from the Saudi embassy in Istanbul, Turkey on 2nd October 2018 created magnanimous pressure against the crown Prince Mohammad Bin Salman and his tacit alliance behind the alleged murder of the journalist. It revealed the deep-state prevalent in Saudi Arabia along with the innumerable human rights abuses that were taking place against the activists.

Nevertheless, while both of them were facing the political ramifications within their own borders, their rivalry was clearly more palpable in their respective roles in the Syrian crisis. Syria, due to its civil war, had become the hotspot for a proxy war between Iran and Saudi Arabia. The growing nexus between Iran, Hezbollah and Syria along with Russia was against the Saudi funding of the Syrian rebels, who were also supported by Qatar, Turkey and United States, be it directly or indirectly. Ribale Sleiman Haidar (2018) have stated how the sunni-shia sectarian tensions had an intricate role to play in the burgeoning conflict. The Saudi regime has

²² Doffman, Z. (2019), Google Cuts YouTube Access For Iran's Press TV And Hispan TV 'Without Any Warning', The Forbes, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/zakdoffman/2019/04/23/google-blocks-iranian-state-tvs-youtube-and-gmail-after-anti-israel-propaganda/#42b1018b77bd>

created a narrative against Iran's theocracy after the 1979 revolution in which they have endowed themselves the role of 'protector' against the expansionist, militaristic and revolutionary Shia politics of Iran. Emulating the concept from the dismantled Soviet Union, they believe that current Iran is in its 'Trotskyist' stage by trying to export its revolution in other Arab countries. Meanwhile, Iran considers Saudi Wahhabism as an existential threat. The constitutional separation between the government and the state in Iran further adds to this rivalry. The growing alliance between Saudi Arabia, Israel and US is another political concern. Thus, the competing legitimacies of both Iran and Saudi Arabia have ties with their historical domination in the region.²³

What needs to be understood is that both Tehran and Riyadh are major powerhouses in the Gulf politics. At the same time, scholar Luiza Gimenez Cerioli (2018) clearly states that the ideological rivalry between Tehran and Saudi Arabia is mainly driven by mirror-opposite identities and interests along with the normative ideation of what the regional order should look like. Distinguishing oneself from the 'other' on the basis of the cognitive psychology has also a role to play, where messages are conveyed through political rhetoric, symbols, speeches, media platforms, visual images as well as the security state.²⁴ It is important to mention that media, be it regional, local or international, is just one of the actors in the discourse of political rhetoric. At the same time, the definition of rivalry needs to be understood, as given by Thompson (2001):

'Feelings of enmity between countries, materialized in a relationship characterized by extreme competition, and usually psychological hostility, in which the issues and positions of contenders are governed primarily by their attitude towards each other'²⁵

These feelings of enmity basically differentiate themselves on the basis of which both Iran and Saudi Arabia view Islam. On one hand, Saudi Arabia believes in regional status quo power, Iran focuses on revolutionary change, both through the rhetoric of religion. At the same time, the regional power clout of Saudi Arabia in the Gulf region is more than Iran's. Though, what has challenged the upcoming future in the Gulf region is definitely the withdrawal of US troops from Syria and Afghanistan which would have long lasting security concerns for Saudi Arabia primarily. The funding and training of several Shia militia organizations in Iraq by Iran is a burgeoning concern.²⁶

²³ Haidar, R.S., (2018), Saudi Arabia and Iran: Beyond Conflict and Co-existence, *LSE Middle East Centre*, http://eprints.lse.ac.uk/89829/1/MEC_Saudi-Arabia-Iran_Published.pdf

²⁴ Cerioli, L.G. (2018), Roles and International Behaviour: Saudi-Iranian Rivalry in Bahrain's and Yemen's Arab Spring, *Contexto Internacional* vol. 40(2), <http://www.scielo.br/pdf/cint/v40n2/0102-8529-cint-2018400200295.pdf>

²⁵ Thompson, W. R. (2001), Identifying Rivals and Rivalries in World Politics, *International Studies Quarterly* 45(4): 557-586

²⁶ Terrill, W.A., (2011), 'The Saudi Iranian rivalry and the future of Middle Eastern Security,' *Strategic Studies Institute*, <https://apps.dtic.mil/dtic/tr/fulltext/u2/a555137.pdf>

Contextualizing Saudi Arabia and Iranian rivalry through Agenda setting theory

In order to understand why state-media relations need to be established as the basic rule for governing the masses, it's essential to understand the "Agenda Setting Theory." One of the first theories in political communications which highlights this mandatory need of connection between state and media, "Agenda Setting Theory" has eventually led the benchmark of understanding the dynamics. (McCombs and Weaver 1985)²⁷

Theorized by Maxwell E. McCombs and Donald L. Shaw in 1972, the "Agenda Setting Theory" was able to question the motivations behind the working of the media. According to this theory, though media would not clearly state 'how' the readers to think, but they certainly dictate on 'what' the readers should think. The political reality is shaped in the manner in which broadcasters, editors, newsroom policies and editorial guidelines are set.

The importance of any news story is carved out by the manner in which it is placed, the amount of factual information included, the sources interviewed and the data generated. For example, during election times, the manner in which media narrates the story creates the 'agenda' behind the campaigning and accordingly, the value that is endowed to the respective campaigns.

Two elements which are important in the agenda setting theory are awareness and information. The core assumptions of this theory are as follows:

- 1) Instead of reflecting the reality, the media shapes and filters it
- 2) The media concentration of a particular issue is directly proportional to the importance it generates within the readers.

It is essential to understand the agenda setting theory is based on the respective time-frame utilized to analyze the context (Rogers & Dearing 1988: 63).

Meanwhile, different forms of media would have different potentials for agenda-setting. Nevertheless, media remains the easily available and primary source of information which is available for the audience and hence, each media platforms/channels play a role, according to their impact, intensity of news, political commentary and understanding the critical points of the audience. Thus, they have the power to shape the political reality of a country, depending on their own outlook, motivations, policies and jurisprudence. Thus, according to this theory, state 'needs' to understand the triggers of media and accordingly establish a dynamic relationship with it, in order to slowly push pressure, domesticate it and eventually utilize its reach and scope for its benefits.(Kleinnijhuis and Rietberg:1995)²⁸

²⁷McCombs, M.E., & Weaver, D. (1985). *Toward a Merger of Gratifications and Agenda-Setting Research*. In: Rosengren, K.E., Wenner, L.A. & Palmgreen, P. (Eds.) *Media Gratifications Research: Current Perspectives*. Beverly Hills, Sage: California

²⁸Kleinnijhuis, J. & Rietberg, E.M. (1995). Parties, media, the public and the economy: Patterns of societal agenda-setting. *European journal of political research: official journal of the European Consortium for Political Research*, 28(1), 95-118

There are basically three critical types of agendas that are set by the media.²⁹

- 1) **Public Agenda setting:** Media plays a pivotal role in setting the political agenda for the public by filtering and shaping their reality. It dictates the various necessary issues that become the 'agendas' for the public, especially during the times of elections, protests, upheaval or demonstrations. Depending on which political party is influencing the respective media, the views and biases of the media would change in public agenda building.
- 2) **Media Agenda setting:** The media itself chooses to set its own agenda, choose political sides, and create its broadcasting policy on the basis of the current factors that dictate its political leaning.
- 3) **Policy agenda setting:** The elite policy makers play an important role in shaping the agenda of the media and the public. It dictates which Government Issue or social cause should be formulated into a policy. The definition of policy agenda might differ.

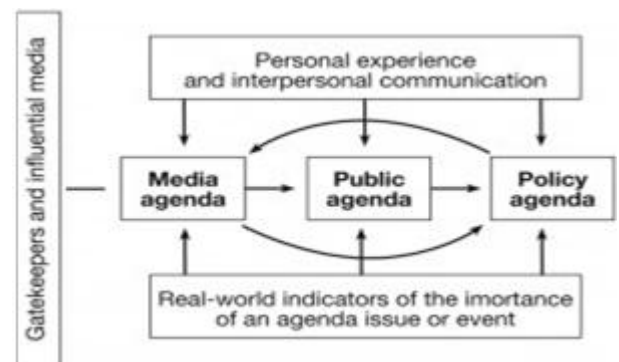


Figure 1: Three Main Components of the Agenda-Setting Process: The Media Agenda, Public Agenda and Policy Agenda. (Rogers And Dearing, 1988)

The manner in which Agenda Setting Theory functions depends on the 'accessibility' that it creates for the news. Here, the term 'accessibility' means a cognitive process through the media impacts the audience's memory by repeatedly broadcasting/printing about a particular issue, eventually giving it the status of national importance.

Though, this strategy is often misunderstood by media scholars in general. 'Accessibility' does not imply just broadcasting/ printing a particular news issue over and over again. Instead, it means that different kinds of content (editorial, live reporting, analysis, political debates, etc) are done for various different aspects of a particular issue, over and over again, so that it becomes important. The impact here works in a very subtle way by making people think/question about what others are might be thinking/questioning. Hence, the more important the news issue needs to be, the more extensively it is covered by the media (Weaver 2007: 45)

²⁹Rogers, E.M., & Dearing, J.W. (1988). *Agenda-setting research: Where has it been? Where is it going?* In: Anderson, J.A. (Ed.). *Communication yearbook 11* (555-594). Newbury Park, Sage: California

The limitations of Agenda Setting Theory are quite a few. Starting with, it suffers from serious loopholes with the emergence of social media and citizen journalism where the traditional media outlets do not have the same power hegemony in shaping and filtering the political reality. Nowadays, the audience can get information, analysis and political commentary through social media and following the political authors/activists/bloggers/independent journalists instead of the mainstream media.

Hence, it creates a situation where there are many political realities working simultaneously, eventually creating a chaotic environment. Secondly, the theory does not apply to countries with heavy media censorship and only applicable to democracies where certain level of press freedom is guaranteed by the government. Thirdly, the impact of 'accessibility' has also decreased over time as the number of media platforms (be it print or broadcast) have emerged and hence, the lower attention span of the audience creates a problem in the longer run.

Nevertheless, it was important to start the analysis of various media theories and models with Agenda Setting theory because of the following reasons. Firstly, it starkly reveals that the reality shaped and filtered by the media is not necessarily the real picture. Secondly, the theory reveals why it is so essential for the state to establish a relationship with the media so that the political reality can be filtered and shaped in accordance to the agenda of the state.

Media Rivalry between Saudi Arabia and Iran

To focus on the media rivalry between Saudi Arabia and Iran, the paper would take the case study of Press TV and Al Arabiya from January 2019-May 2019. The time-frame has been chosen mainly to include the topical events of this year for placing the Iran-Saudi Arabia rivalry within the current context.

According to the agenda setting theory, the broadcasted news articles and opinion pieces would be discussed.

Analysis of news reports of Press TV

The analysis of the news reports of the Press TV (includes news articles, opinion pieces and programmes) are as follows:

- 1) Total number of reports focused on Saudi Arabia: 425
- 2) Total number of reports focused on Trump Administration: 514
- 3) Total number of news programs: 234

To have a brief understanding of the reports and the narrative used by Press TV, 10 news reports are mentioned in detail.

1. Kushner, Greenblatt in Middle East to seek support for Trump's 'peace' plan: 28th May, 2019³⁰

The article focuses on the personal connection between Jared Kushner and President Trump while no information is provided about Jason Greenblatt, the Middle East special

³⁰ Press TV, (28th May 2019), Kushner, Greenblatt in Middle East to seek support for Trump's 'peace' plan, <https://www.presstv.com/Detail/2019/05/28/597160/US-Kushner-Greenblatt-Middle-East-Manama>

envoy of US. Grasping the vulnerable and fragile issue of the Palestinian cause, the report explains how Trump's 'deal of the century' would be heavily pro-Israel. Though, the report calls the deal as the 'slap of the century but fails to mention the official sources from Palestinian leadership who have used this term. It mentions that Qatar, Egypt, Jordan, Oman, Saudi Arabia and UAE would participate in the conference at Bahrain on 25-26th June 2019. Press TV calls it an 'abortive event.'

2. Trump understands his B-team wants to drag US into war with Iran: Analyst: 28th May 2019³¹

Adapting the analysis by US scholar James Jastras, the report states that President Trump understands that his B-Team (comprising of Bolton, Mohammad Bin Salman and Benjamin Netanyahu) wants to drag US into a 'disastrous' war with Iran. It also mentions about the anti-Iran domestic and regional officials. It mentions how Iran's Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif has termed it as 'economic terrorism.'

3. France blasts 'dirty' Saudi-led war, but keeps arms flow: 28th May 2019³²

The report states that France has been urging both UAE and Saudi Arabia to end the 'dirty war' in Yemen but continues to sell arms to the Gulf. The ramifications of the war in Yemen (since 2015) has killed 'tens of thousands' of Yemenis, as a result of trying to establish the prior Yemeni officials again, as they have 'close links' with Saudi Arabia.

4. Houthi: Saudi-led siege of Yemen's al-Durayhimi 'obvious crime': 27th May 2019

The report establishes the fact that Saudi-led military coalition has controlled the Yemeni city of al-Durayhimi by a 'tight siege.' It quotes the views of Yemen's Houthi Ansarullah movement. The source of this information is Yemen's Arabic-language al-Masirah TV. It mentions that the 'imposed war' involves aerial campaign, ground mercenaries and naval blockade leading to the death of 56,000 Yemenis. There's no source provides for this statistics. Though, it does quote UN's report that 22.2 million Yemenis are in need of food while 8.4 million Yemenis are suffering from severe hunger. Towards, the end the report mentions that US, UK and France are involved in supplying Saudi Arabia with military equipments and advanced warfare equipments but no source is mentioned.

5. Arms sales to Saudi all about American jobs: Academic: 25th May 2019³³

The report interviews David Yaghoubian, a History Professor at the CSU San Bernardino University, who

³¹ Press TV, (28th May 2019), Trump understands his B-team wants to drag US into war with Iran: Analyst, <https://www.presstv.com/Detail/2019/05/28/597159/Trump-Bteam-wants-to-drag-US-into-war-with-Iran>

³² Press TV, (28th May 2019), France blasts 'dirty' Saudi-led war, but keeps arms flow, <https://www.presstv.com/Detail/2019/05/28/597147/France-Saudi-Arabia-United-Arab-Emirates-war-Yemen-weapons>

³³ Press TV, (25th May 2019), Arms sales to Saudi all about American jobs: Academic, <https://www.presstv.com/Detail/2019/05/25/596841/US-Saudi-Arabia-Arms-Sales>

mentions that Trump administration would continue with the 22 arms deals worth \$8 billion to supply arms and weapons to UAE and Saudi Arabia to mainly safeguard their 'military-industrial complex.'

6. Why Trump wants to get close to Saudi Arabia: 25th May 2019³⁴

Quoting James Petras, the report mentions that the Chris Murphy, the Connecticut Democrat as well as member of Senate Foreign Relations Committee, has mentioned that US might incite war with Iran to maintain its supply of weapons to Riyadh. Going against the Arms control Act, the Trump administration would call the current context as an 'emergency'. Along with the arms deal, Trump administration has very few allies in the region, thus the bilateral relationship with Saudi Arabia is important.

7. Far East reaching tentacles of Wahhabism: 23rd May 2019³⁵

The report mentions that Saudi Arabia has spend around \$100 billion including at least \$87 billion from 1987 to 2007 to export Wahhabism. The sources of this information is not quoted and just generalized as 'networks based on religious authorities.'

8. US pursue Iranophobia to milk Arab regional states: Iran cmdr.: 22nd May 2019³⁶

The report mentions how Major General Abdolrahim Moussavi, the Iranian Army commander-in-chief, believes that US is using 'Iranophobia' to milk other Arab countries. He mentions the sabotage attack at commercial ships in the UAE's territorial waters as well as the attack on two Saudi tankers at the port of Fujairah on May 12th. The lack of evidence and no party claiming responsibility of the attacks is mentioned. It also mentions that few American diplomats have claimed that the sabotage attacks were caused by Iran. A very tough line by Moussavi stating 'Enemies must know that they will be totally destroyed should they try to ignite a war' is included in the report. In the likelihood of Iran instigating another attack, US has deployed aircraft carrier strike group, assault ship and bomber taskforce in the region.

9. Missing journalists in Saudi Arabia are alive, kept in detention: RSF: 22nd May 2019³⁷

A quote from Reporters Without Borders (RSF) is utilized to reveal that two journalists who went missing in Saudi Arabia are arrested by the Saudi Intelligence forces and are

currently jailed in some unknown location in the country, signaling the lack of freedom of press. The two journalists are Marwan al-Muraisi (Yemeni) and Abdel Rahman Farhaneh (Jordanian). RSF also states that there are 29 more journalists detained under similar circumstances. Currently, Saudi Arabia ranks 172 out of the 180 countries in the press freedom rankings of RSF. Crown Prince MBS has been accused behind these arrests. The instance of the murder of Jamal Khashoggi is also added in the report.

10. Israel lobby in US pushing for war against Iran: Analyst: 23rd May 2019³⁸

Press TV interviewed Michael Jones, the current editor of Culture Wars magazine, who states that the Israeli Lobby AIPAC is involved in escalating tensions between US and Iran. The narrative is contextualized in the same rhetoric that was employed by the Bush administration to gain legitimacy for the war in Iraq and Afghanistan. Both John Bolton and Mike Pompeo have been termed as 'hawkish advisors.' The blacklisting of the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) is also included. US Senator Lindsey Graham is termed as a 'war hawk' who threatened Iran for military consequences. The report mentions that the sabotage attack on the oil tankers and installations had been carried out by US intelligence to create another war in the region. The names of these sources and analysts are not mentioned.

Conclusion of the reports of Press TV

After a careful study of the news reports of Press TV, the following conclusion of their agenda can be scrutinized.

- 1) The primary agenda of Press TV has been to continuously churn out reports against Saudi Arabia, US, UAE and Israel.
- 2) The very fact that it is an agenda to filter out the editorial policy in the above mentioned rhetoric gets clear in following ways. Firstly, there's no name of any journalist/reporter/opinion piece writer for any of the reports. Secondly, very few international organizations are used as the source. In most of the cases, the sources are not identified. Thirdly, most of the reports have 1-3 minute clips on the videos broadcasted on the channel, but it does not carry the main analysis. Fourthly, the editorial policy has been to continuously write at least 2-3 stories a day against US and Saudi Arabia. Fifthly, there is no news reportage from within Iran and its own domestic issues.
- 3) Press TV focuses completely on political rhetoric instead of other factors like culture, sports, economics, societal-conditions, domestic issues and others. In terms of professionalism, Press TV tried to emulate the website structure of other international media platforms but fails in executing the journalistic standards.

Analysis of news reports of Al Arabiya TV

The analysis of the news reports of the Al Arabiya TV (includes news articles, opinion pieces and programmes) are as follows:

- 1) Total number of reports focused on Iran: 487

³⁴ Press TV, (25th May 2019), Why Trump wants to get close with Saudi Arabia, <https://www.presstv.com/Detail/2019/05/24/596800/Why-Trump-wants-to-get-close-to-Saudi-Arabia>

³⁵ Press TV, (23rd May 2019), Far East reaching tentacles of Wahhabism, <https://www.presstv.com/Detail/2019/05/23/596655/FarEast-Reaching-Tentacles-Of-Wahhabism>

³⁶ Press TV, (22nd May 2019), US pursues Iranophobia to milk Arab regional states: Iran cmdr., <https://www.presstv.com/Detail/2019/05/22/596643/Iran-US-tension-Arabs-Iranophobia-Donald-Trump>

³⁷ Press TV, (22nd May 2019), Missing journalists in Saudi Arabia are alive, kept in detention: RSF <https://www.presstv.com/Detail/2019/05/22/596634/Saudi-Arabia-missing-journalists-Muraisi-Farhaneh>

³⁸ Press TV, (23rd May 2019), Israel lobby in US pushing for war against Iran: Analyst, <https://www.presstv.com/Detail/2019/05/22/596589/US-Iran-war-E-Michael-Jones>

2) Total number of reports focused on Trump Administration: 556

3) Total number of opinion pieces: 187

To have a brief understanding of the reports and the narrative used by Al Arabiya TV, 10 news reports are mentioned in detail.

1. Bolton: Ships sabotaged off UAE coast attacked 'almost certainly by Iran': 29th May 2019³⁹

The report clearly states that John Bolton has mentioned that the sabotage of ships off the UAE coast by perpetuated by Iran. Two exact locations, which are Green Zone in the Iraqi capital Baghdad (rocket attack) and Saudi Arabia's East West Pipeline have been highlighted. The rhetoric of Iran having nuclear weapons is further included, mentioning how Saudi Arabia, UAE and US are on the same page regarding it. Bolton's threat to Iran and its 'surrogates' have been mentioned without identifying them.

2. Iran-based social media scheme impersonating US politicians shuttered: 29th May 2019⁴⁰

The report mentions how Cyber security policy Nathaniel Gleicher of internet security firm FireEye has mentioned that Facebook has removed 51 accounts, 36 pages and seven groups from its platform for their collaboration with Iran. Twitter, similarly has removed 2,800 'inauthentic' accounts. California-based FireEye mentioned how these accounts impersonated several American politicians, espousing both conservative as well as Democrat beliefs. The individuals behind these fake accounts, traced to US and Europe, had contacted US policy makers, politicians, activists and journalists in the past.

3. US sets up \$75 mln grant to combat Iranian 'disinformation' in Syria: 28th May 2019⁴¹

It is revealed that US State Department has set up a \$75 million grant in order to control the misinformation spread by ISIS as well as Iran in Syria. Syria is termed as a 'war torn' country. This grant has been called as 'Supporting Local Governance and Civil Society in Syria' grant which would be given to civil societies and NGOs in Syria under the legal framework of UN Security Council Resolution 2254. No information is provided about how would the selection of NGOs for the grants would be made. It also does not mention how statistically, the figure of \$75 million was reached. The longevity of the grant is also not discussed.

³⁹ Al Arabiya TV (29th May 2019), Bolton: Ships sabotaged off UAE coast attacked 'almost certainly by Iran', <https://english.alarabiya.net/en/News/world/2019/05/29/Bolton-Ships-sabotaged-off-UAE-coast-attacked-almost-certainly-by-Iran.html>

⁴⁰ Al Arabiya TV. (29th May 2019), Iran-based social media scheme impersonating US politicians shuttered, <https://english.alarabiya.net/en/media/digital/2019/05/29/Iran-based-social-media-scheme-impersonating-US-politicians-shuttered.html>

⁴¹ Al Arabiya TV (28th May 2019), US sets up \$75 mln grant to combat Iranian 'disinformation' in Syria, <https://english.alarabiya.net/en/News/middle-east/2019/05/28/Report-US-strategy-in-Syria-includes-grant-to-combat-Iranian-disinformation-.html>

4. Secondary sanctions would put Tehran and Hezbollah in an economic chokehold – By Khairallah Khairallah: 28th May 2019⁴²

Calling the US imposed sanctions on Iran as 'significant reduction waivers,' the report mentions how no leniency would be granted by US for countries that continue oil deals with Iran. Bestowing Islamic Revolution Guards Corps as a terrorist organization is another welcome step. The author recommends that US should also blacklist all the Iranian banks that would further strangle its economy. It suggests that GCC allies of the US should also impose sanctions on Iran and Hezbollah. The ideation is to transform Hezbollah from being an asset to the Iranian foreign policy into a political liability. The author suggests that a strong alliance between US and GCC would be a blow to European countries that have sided in support of Iran.

5. Iranians, using #NIACLobbies4mullahs, express anger toward US-based lobby group: 28th May 2019⁴³

The report mentions that 'thousands of twitter users' have tweeted against the Iranian lobby group with the hashtag #NIACLobbies4mullahs to clearly state that the lobby group does not meet their ideologies or interests. It states that National Iranian American Council (NIAC) as a lobby group is severely pro Iranian regime. On the contrary, Council's current president, Jamal Abdi has stated that US is funding @Irandisinfo to create this conflict. The founder Trita Parsi has been accused of suing Iranian-American bloggers who wrote against the regime. No statistics, names or data has been given in this context.

6. Iran foreign ministry shuns Trump's mediation offer: 28th May 2019⁴⁴

The report quotes the words of Mohammad Javad Zarif, the Iranian Foreign Minister, mentioning that Japan's attempt to mediate tensions between US and Iran will not function. It also clearly mentions that Iran has no intent of any mediation and negotiations with US since it withdrew from the Nuclear Deal. The Vice President of Iran, Eshaq Jahangiri had clearly stated that Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei has banned the nuclear development in the country.

7. Coalition: Iran-supplied missiles to Houthis pose threat to the region: 27th May 2019⁴⁵

⁴² Al Arabiya TV (28th May 2019), Secondary sanctions would put Tehran and Hezbollah in an economic chokehold, <https://english.alarabiya.net/en/views/news/middle-east/2019/05/28/Secondary-sanctions-would-put-Tehran-and-Hezbollah-in-an-economic-chokehold.html>

⁴³ Al Arabiya (28th May 2019), Iranians, using #NIACLobbies4mullahs, express anger toward US-based lobby group, <https://english.alarabiya.net/en/News/middle-east/2019/05/28/Iranians-using-NIACLobbies4mullahs-express-anger-toward-US-based-lobby-group.html>

⁴⁴ Al Arabiya TV (28th May 2019), Iran foreign ministry shuns Trump's mediation offer, <https://english.alarabiya.net/en/News/middle-east/2019/05/28/Iran-foreign-ministry-shuns-Trump-s-mediation-offer.html>

⁴⁵ Al Arabiya TV (27th May 2019), Coalition: Iran-supplied missiles to Houthis pose threat to the region, <https://english.alarabiya.net/en/News/gulf/2019/05/28/Coalition-Iran-supplied-missiles-to-Houthis-pose-threat-to-the-region.html>

The report starts with the perception of Arab Coalition spokesman Colonel Turki al-Maliki who categorically mentions that Iran has been supplying weapons to the Houthis. It mentions the supply of missiles by the Iranian Revolutionary Guards to Houthi militias. How this data has been reached and the intricate connections been investigated have not been supported by any facts but mere political rhetoric. The article also links with another report that mentions how the Saudi Air defense has neutralized and destroyed a Houthi drone, thereby discussing it through cause-effect analysis.

8. Iran Deputy FM discusses 'regional development' in Oman: 26th May 2019⁴⁶

The source of this report is state-run Oman news agency. It mentions how the Iranian Deputy Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi is currently in Oman to discuss the "regional developments" with Yusuf bin Alawi bin Abdullah, Oman's minister for Foreign Affairs. It also mentions how Araghchi would also travel to Kuwait and Qatar for the same reasons.

9. A history lesson for Javad Zarif: Iran is greater than its regime: By Nadim Koteich: 25th May 2019⁴⁷

The opinion piece by Nadim Koteich starts with the view of Javad Zarif who responded to President Trump's threat of a war with Iran by mentioning that Iran has historically faced Alexander and Genghis Khan and survived, thus hinting clearly that any US threat would not rebuke the country. The author contextualizes Javad's rhetoric with that of Saddam Hussein on the eve of the US invasion of Iraq in 2003. Hence, Iran is as disillusioned by historic parallelism as Iraq was then. He also incorporates the analogy of President Hassan Rouhani who compared the current clash with the 1980-88 war between Iran and Iraq, stating that during that time Iran did not suffer economically due to the sanctions on banks and oil deals. The author also mentions that there are several social media accounts of 'courageous' Iranians who regularly post about their trials and tribulations under the current sanctions. There is no source, data or identification behind this assumption by the author.

10. Iranian general: We've exported our culture to armed groups in Yemen, Lebanon: 25th May 2019⁴⁸

The report quotes Brigadier General Hassan Seifi, the Assistant to Iranian's Army Chief, who states that Iran has 'exported their culture' to armed groups in Gaza, Afghanistan, Lebanon and Yemen. In this report, the agenda is to create an analogy with the intent of Iran trying to export

its 1979 revolution to the other countries to control its dominance.

Conclusion: Contextualizing conflict resolution by Press TV and Al Arabiya TV

It is interesting to note down that there were two factors that led to the emergence of both Press TV and Al Arabiya TV. Firstly, it can be seen as a response to 9/11 attacks, in which both Iran and Saudi Arabia felt that their respective side of story was not being given ample scrutiny in the context of evolving Islamophobia. Though, the intensity and ramifications for Saudi Arabia was much more than that of Iran, when compared to its links with Al Qaeda, both the countries did experience a certain vilification by the Western media giants in revealing the real voices from their own geographies.

The second and interesting reason for their emergence was definitely the establishment of Al Jazeera. Both Arabic and well as English bureaus of Al Jazeera had marked Qatar in the political geography of the Gulf region, making it punch above its weight, as perceived by them. This approach reveals the necessity of state-run media channels for providing legitimacy and propaganda as well as manufacturing consent in the heavily mediated and consumption oriented political reality.

The narrative which perhaps binds both Press TV and Al Arabiya TV are on the basis of few accusations, editorial policies and intents that are followed by both against each other. Firstly, both accuse the other of exporting in the region. Secondly, both the media platforms do not have well researched articles and opinion pieces, as followed by western news media platforms. Though, in terms of professionalism, Al Arabiya is more structured than Press TV, but it needs to be considered that many of their news pieces are sourced from western news agencies like AFP. Thirdly, United States forms a major part in their daily analysis. Press TV regularly broadcasts videos and uploads opinion pieces against the Trump administration. While, Al Arabiya TV often used the quotes and analysis of the American diplomats and advisors to make a statement against Iran to the point that it appears as a mouthpiece of the White House.

It must be scrutinized that both Press TV and Al Arabiya TV are already involved in a media-induced conflict through these two networks. On an everyday basis, there is mudslinging and attack against each other, often on the basis of rhetoric and not facts. Thus, the credibility and legitimacy of both the media networks is challenged and limited by their own narratives.

Additionally, both Press TV and Al Arabiya do not post news analysis or opinion pieces about their own domestic issues, which might jeopardize their political intentions. Hence, concepts like social justice, human rights, civil societies and their role are not included from their own standpoint, which would definitely have political ramifications. Thus, in the context of this paper and the various agendas that have been followed by these two media networks, it becomes aptly clear that they are not different from each other, in fact they just mirror each other and

⁴⁶ Al Arabiya TV (26th May 2019), Iran Deputy FM discusses 'regional development' in Oman, <https://english.alarabiya.net/en/News/middle-east/2019/05/26/Iran-Deputy-FM-discusses-regional-development-in-Oman.html>

⁴⁷ Al Arabiya TV (26th May 2019), A history lesson for Javad Zarif: Iran is greater than its regime, <https://english.alarabiya.net/en/views/news/middle-east/2019/05/25/A-history-lesson-for-Javad-Zarif-Iran-is-greater-than-its-regime.html>

⁴⁸ Al Arabiya TV (25th May 2019), Iranian general: We've exported our culture to armed groups in Yemen, Lebanon, <https://english.alarabiya.net/en/News/middle-east/2019/05/25/Iranian-general-We-ve-exported-our-culture-to-armed-groups-in-Yemen-Lebanon.html>

retaliate in the same predictable manner, which definitely corrodes their authenticity in the global media landscapes.

To focus on the conflict resolution that can be incorporated by media networks, Press TV and Al Arabiya, the following insights would be useful to neutralize the growing clash within the Gulf region.

Firstly, the Machiavellian discourse followed by both Press TV and Al Arabiya TV to summarise the clash in the Gulf region as a realist zero sum game needs to be removed. This realist tendency has acted as a major perpetrator in creating propaganda and hyper-reality by both the media networks to an alarming degree. The first step in this regard would be to broaden the horizon of both the media networks into culture, sports and development-initiated stories instead of blatant and brutal political rhetoric. Additionally, there should be equal responsibility placed on both the media networks to cover their own domestic politics instead of accusing each other in their respective political clout.

Secondly, both Press TV and Al Arabiya should only focus and broadcast those news articles and analyses that have facts, official sources and statistics instead of political verbatim and rhetoric. Press TV should categorically take the responsibility of their broadcast by giving names of the journalists involved. Similarly, Al Arabiya TV should not just generalize the news coverage by their staff writers and mention names. It would create transparency and authenticity as the journalists would be responsible for their coverage, thereby causing more legitimacy and concrete knowledge of the future ramifications. Al Arabiya TV should stop churning out articles directly from the western news agencies and lower down its functioning as an American mouthpiece.

Thirdly, perhaps the most important aspect missing from the current coverage by both the media networks is the space for democratic debate and critique. Just as Al Jazeera network gives the platform to both Israeli and Palestinian leadership personnel to put out their views and debate in the public, the Iranian and Saudi media agencies should do the same. The entire ethics of journalism and mass media functioning is to act without a bias. Instead of the daily mediated attack against each other on every news story, the official sources, activists, academics having affiliations to both these media networks should inhabit the space for a debate and rigorous questioning. It would not only placate the tensions, but would also enhance the legitimacy of these media networks at the global media landscape. It would also give more preference to the identities and interests of the common citizens of these two countries to empower their political acumen and make informed choices on the basis of transparency and topical contexts.

As the paper has already pronounced the idea that the clash between Saudi Arabia and Iran is manufactured, the role of media in manufacturing this ongoing clash can be dealt only through transparency, control and media-dependence. In a nutshell, the manufacturing of news according to the retaliatory response should be kept at bay to create a more nuanced understanding of the Gulf region where the other

countries should also be involved democratically, instead of being mere bystanders of the rising clash.

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